

MIRACLES

BY GOVERNEUR MORRIS.

A Story of the Hills Which Has An Unusually Striking Climax

THE first thing that happened wasn't exactly a miracle. Just the same, it was a wonderful happening.

That you were 21 years old and that all your life long you had desired an automobile (any kind that would go) and a fruit ranch. Suppose, then, that upon the morning of your 21st birthday a man of law came to the ranch and told you that you must give up your parents and inform him that your mother's brother, a crochety old fellow whom nobody had seen or heard of for years, had died and made you his heir and left you nearly a thousand dollars in cash, a hundred and a little fruit ranch in the most levelled of valleys which runs the year round between the City of Salinas and the City of Monterey.

It was to Ruddy Copeland that the amazing thing happened, and it was very, very early in the morning, less than five days old before he had bought a very second-hand special roadster painted a delicate baby blue—and set forth to view the more productive part of his inheritance.

The day was bright, though the old mission city of San Juan. And here he ran plumb into his first miracle. But I am afraid he scoffed at them at that time and was very skeptical as to the true miraculosity of them.

Upon the top of a hill just outside the city a miracle man and his disciple had pitched a tent. The miracle man wore a long white robe and a long white beard and from morning till late at night he talked in a sing-song voice about his ability to heal the sick by the simple act of laying his hands upon them and wishing them well. His disciples, a stout man and stout women with gold-rimmed spectacles, went about saying that everything the miracle man said was true and selling photographs at 50 cents apiece.

The hill upon which the miracle tent had been pitched was covered with people. They had flocked to see the miracle man from points more than 100 miles distant. Some of them were very sick people who had to be carried by their friends. Every kind of crutch, cripple and ear trumpet was to be seen. There were hunchbacks in the crowd, legs that had shrivelled to the size of broomsticks and spines so twisted that they resembled pretzel. The name of the people who had come to see the miracle man, or, like Ruddy Copeland, had stopped off on their way to see something else, were only suffering from curiosity.

Once a while broke out half way up the hill and several people were knocked down and trampled on. It all came about because of a Mexican with a big white scar on his face.

The scar gleamed like silver and suddenly Ruddy said to somebody else that this man was a leper. The everybody tried to get away from the vicinity of the leper as quickly as possible.

AROUND the miracle tent itself and the space in front of it the crowd was large for 10 days. Ruddy never got near enough to the miracle man to hear him and word of what the miracle man was doing was passed by the fortunate spectators in the front row to those behind them.

Except for the endless singing boasting of the miracle man, who would be silenced. At the end of these silences there would be a clapping of hands. This applause might mean that the power of locomotion had been returned to a hopeless cripple or right to a blind man.

Whenever the applause sounded the sick people on their way up the hill who had been waiting for hours and hours to get a chance at the miracle man would become half frenzied with excitement.

They all knew that they would be cured. Their friends and relatives hoped against reason and knowledge. But people who had never been sick themselves or taken a vital interest in sick people had no faith at all. They thought that the miracle man was a fake.

That was what Ruddy Copeland thought. The show tickled him. He believed in doctors and surgeons.

He tried for a while to find some one or other who believed in a cure for the miracle man or something or other, but failed. Only the front rows on the top of the hill saw the cures made, and thereafter the cured persons never seemed to come out of the charmed circle where they could get at them and talk with them.

Ruddy Copeland gave up in disgust. Whatever doubt he had about cures, he had none about disease. There were Biblical diseases in view, running, sores and all the things that troubled the job. And the were undoubtedly diseases more serious and less evident that one might breathe in and develop inside one's self. Also there were little children, so lame and sick and miserable that they could never hope to grow up. And Ruddy, whose heart was unphilosophical and tender, could not bear to look at them.

He climbed into his baby blue flivver and proceeded over the mountains to Salinas. He had made inquiries as to the exact location of the little ranch which he had inherited, and how to find it.

NOW the word ranch is an elastic word. It means anything from a half-acre of cabbages to a million acres of sage brush, and it is to which the cures led him and with whose ranch house he had the keys of his pocket, was easily found.

The little white house stood on the top of a very little hill. The hill, perhaps 40 feet high, had an incline, and was used for the accommodation of blackberry vines and their orderly trellises, and was entirely surrounded by 20 acres of well grown pear trees. Gentle hills dotted with live oaks in turn surrounded the orchard and a dirt road leading directly separated it from the highway over which people travel between Salinas and Monterey.

The dwelling house contained a living room, bedroom, a bathroom and a kitchen. Outside it looked like an old house, the kind that child draws on a slate, but inside it looked new.

Ruddy's late uncle may have been crochety, but he had loved simplicity and white paint. Ruddy's new home may have been simple and unpretentious as a monk's cell, but it was as clean and sweet as a rosebud.

At the moment, however, considering the house together with Ruddy's youth and good health, the house had one grave drawback. It contained nothing to eat.

It was Ruddy's intention to eat in Monterey, to buy groceries and return to his ranch. But when he saw the Mission Church perched aloft, with the lagoon at its feet and the town of Monterey spread out before him and the surrounding hills softened with pines and oaks and the blue sparkling bay, something queer happened to his eyes, and first time in his young life he perceived that the world is not only to be considered in terms of progress, but in terms of beauty as well.

And that was Ruddy's first real miracle.

When he had eaten and bought groceries he did not at once return to his ranch. In the restaurant they ate the sum of one cent, 17 cents, a drive of strange trees which grow nowhere else in the world, of an ocean-bound city called Pacific Grove, where sin is unknown, of Carmel, where artists and authors live in beauty and speak well of one another, and, finally, of the City of Monterey and the wonderful highlands beyond.

And he determined to see all these wonders before returning to his ranch and taking up his life's work at the beginning.

He was in acquaintance with the Monterey Peninsula, had made persons, even less sensitive and accustomed to beauty than Ruddy Copeland, absolutely groggy. Neither the Bay of Naples nor the Riviera nor the Isles of Greece, nor Sappho sang—and ought to have been arrested—can hold a candle to it.

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AFTER a day and a half or eight, seeing Ruddy drive slowly up the same hillside in the approach to Monterey from Carmel, a very different person from the 21-year-old boy who so recently had inherited a fruit ranch and nearly \$1,000 in cash.

His heart had always been the person who appeared to make the world go round and who through personal initiative, energy and inventiveness, have acquired large fortunes. And now he felt that a false rating of those persons by his life's work had led him to believe that he wished that at the university, instead of studying business and mechanics, he had taken all the courses in art and literature. He was a good man. He did his very best.

Ruddy was rapidly finding himself face to face with his first really strong temptation. It was the kind of temptation which older and wiser men have.

"Suppose," he said, "it took a lot of courage to say 'I'm calm and sweet,' 'that I'll have to go to some institution.'

Ruddy groaned inwardly.

"What's wrong?" he asked.

"That's what you walk?" he asked.

"Nobody seems to know exactly," she said. "I just can't. I had scarlet fever and then I couldn't walk . . . We had some money then; but my doctor gave it all to doctors. He was a good man. He did his very best."

"I'm going to take care of you," he said, "always." And he went on: "I knew it was up to me the minute I saw you and learned you had nobody. But it was scared to say 'I'm calm and sweet,' 'that I'll have to go to some institution.'

"And he wished that he was at once a hero, a millionaire."

"Suppose," he said, "it took a lot of courage to say 'I'm calm and sweet,' 'that I'll have to go to some institution.'

Ruddy groaned inwardly.

"Don't worry," he wanted to say. "Everything will be all right. You shan't go to an institution. I'll take care of you."

"If he had perfect confidence in his power to take care of her and to keep her from going to an institution, he could have made the promise. But he had neither the means nor the experience which promotes confidence. At the same time he had to say something—do something.

"He could not get it out of his mind.

After a while he turned about and drove back up the hill. The horse and the touring car had gone, but the girl was still sitting at the window looking out, and as he seemed to have come to the window had used his dreadfully.

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